Saskatchewan
Education

# Policy Direction For a Core Curriculum

March 1987

87-03056/

# Background

## Directions

In December of 1983, **Directions**, the final report of the Curriculum and Instruction Review Committee, was presented to the Minister of Education. That report has served as a blueprint for educational planning in the province for the last three years. One of the 16 recommendations in **Directions** was that a kindergarten to grade 12 core curriculum be developed for Saskatchewan schools.

## The Public Consultation Phase

In December of 1984, the Minister of Education formed a 24 member committee to describe what a core curriculum should be like for Saskatchewan schools. That committee, known as the Core Curriculum Policy Advisory Committee, produced the report **Program Policy Proposals** and presented it to the Minister in November of 1985.

Since the proposals have broad implications for the future development of kindergarten to grade 12 educational programs, when the report was released the Minister also announced a six month public consultation phase. In the Saskatchewan tradition, this consultation provided an opportunity for those affected by education to become involved in the planning process.

The consultation was designed to get the opinions of teachers, parents, students, the universities, community colleges, technical institutes, representatives from business, labour, agriculture and industry, and other interested members of the public.

The Saskatchewan Education staff prepared more than 400 teachers, administrators and trustees from across the province to lead 700 meetings and obtain reaction to the core curriculum proposals.

Approximately 17,000 response sheets were returned to Saskatchewan Education. In addition, many groups and individuals expressed their opinions and concerns about the core curriculum proposals by submitting letters and briefs to the Minister.

## Core Curriculum Symposium

A symposium on core curriculum was held June 20 and 21 to review the preliminary results of the public consultation. The Minister of Education brought together parents, students, educators, people from business, labour and industry, and other members of the public to recommend modifications to the core curriculum proposals and to offer suggestions for next steps. The final report of the findings of this public consultation is available upon request from Saskatchewan Education.

## Results of the Public Consultation

Responses from the consultation indicated general support for the concepts of common essential learnings and required areas of study. General agreement was also reached on the need to provide time for local programs, the adaptive component, the kindergarten program and credits required for graduation. There was strong reaction against decreasing the amount of time given to language arts. Concerns were also raised about the definition of aesthetic education, combining health and physical education as one area of study, and the lack of time for guidance and counselling at the middle level.

The following were some of the other issues raised about the implementation of the core curriculum proposals:

- inservice education for teachers,
- support for small schools,
- impact upon slower students,
- student evaluation,
- the relationship of special education to the adaptive component, and
- the place of applied and practical arts education in the curriculum.

The public response also revealed an underlying commitment that, regardless of changes which are made, high standards of academic excellence must be maintained in our schools.

The work of the committee and the public consultation has focused on formulating policy direction. A number of decisions about the future policy governing the kindergarten to grade 12 program have been made. Among these decisions are

- The core curriculum has been defined as seven required areas of study and the incorporation of the common essential learnings into all courses of study.
- Curriculum will be developed in each area from kindergarten to grade 12. The curriculum will be appropriate for the developmental level of students. Suggestions for adapting the curriculum to the needs of students will be included in curriculum guides and made available to teachers through inservice education programs.
- Local autonomy has been reaffirmed by providing guidelines for local program decisions within a broad provincial policy framework.

Although a number of decisions about the future of core curriculum in Saskatchewan have been made, this is not the final step in the process. Decision-making about implementation of specific policy directions, and about course content, for example, will continue for years to come. As courses are developed, new questions will arise and new people will become involved in the process.

In addition, some policy areas will require further study by the department in consultation with appropriate reference groups. Some of those areas are:

- school leaving certificates,
- alternative education programs,
- a definition of practical and applied courses, and
- policies regarding heritage languages and French language programs.

The following table outlines 10 of the original proposals put forward by the Core Curriculum Policy Advisory Committee, a brief summary of the public reaction to each proposal and the policy direction for each of the 10 areas. The concerns and ideas expressed during the public consultation and at the symposium were crucial in determining the modification in policy direction that is outlined in this paper.

# Core Curriculum Policy Areas

| Proposals | What the Core Curriculum Committee Proposed | What the Public Said | Policy Direction |
|---|---|---|---|
| Common Essential Learnings | Incorporate the common essential learnings into all courses offered in Saskatchewan schools. | 85% agreed but said the categories need refinement. The need for teacher preparation and inservice education was mentioned often. | 1. Common essential learning categories are to be investigated, defined and incorporated into all new courses of study. The categories will include<br>• critical thinking<br>• technological literacy, including computers<br>• independent learning<br>• communication<br>• numeracy<br>• social skills<br>2. Inservice education designed to assist teachers to incorporate common essential learnings into instruction and content areas will be developed.<br>3. The Board of Teacher Education and Certification will be requested to<br>• review the provincial programs for the education and training of teachers in light of the definition of core curriculum in Saskatchewan.<br>• report its findings and make recommendations it considers advisable to the Minister of Education and the Universities. |

| Proposals | What the Core Curriculum Committee Proposed | What the Public Said | Policy Direction |
|---|---|---|---|
| Required Areas of Study | The required areas of study that will form the core curriculum will be language arts, mathematics, science, social studies, health and physical education, and aesthetic education. | 67% agreed. Concern was expressed about including aesthetic education, especially at the secondary level. Many people thought the name aesthetic education was vague and difficult to understand. There was some concern about combining health and physical education. | 1. The required areas of study that form the core curriculum are to be: language arts, mathematics, science, social studies, health education, arts education, physical education.<br>2. Goals and objectives for each of the required areas of study are to be identified, sequenced and communicated to the educational community.<br>3. Developing required areas of study will follow the curriculum development model outlined in **Directions**.<br>4. Implementing new curriculum will occur on a schedule that is reasonable, and respects the amount of change that can be expected of teachers and supported by boards of education. |

| Proposals | What the Core Curriculum Committee Proposed | What the Public Said | Policy Direction |
|---|---|---|---|
| Kindergarten Program | Kindergarten should remain unchanged except that attention should be paid to the appropriate common essential learnings. | 76% agreed that the program should remain optional and unchanged. Some called for a clearer relationship between kindergarten and grades 1 to 12. | 1. The unique character of the current kindergarten program will remain in effect.<br>2. The kindergarten program guide will be reviewed in light of the common essential learnings and current knowledge about early childhood education. |
| Adaptive Component | 30% of each course of study be reserved for the teacher to adapt the curriculum to meet individual needs of students. | 71% agreed. There was some concern about specifying a per cent. Many said teachers will need inservice education and support. The relationship of the adaptive component to exceptional children is not clear. | 1. In order to support teachers in making necessary adaptations to the curriculum to meet the needs of students<br>• Curriculum guides will suggest activities to enrich, to extend and to reinforce the goals and objectives throughout each of the required areas of study.<br>• Provincial inservice education will include strategies for adapting courses of studies to the needs of the students.<br>2. A statement clarifying the relationship of the core curriculum to programs for exceptional children will be developed. |

| Proposals | What the Core Curriculum Committee Proposed | What the Public Said | Policy Direction |
|---|---|---|---|
| Balance of Provincial/Local Time | Provide 30% of time at the elementary level, 30% of the time at the middle level, and 45% of the time at the secondary level for local program determination. | 63% agreed with the ideas of local decisions about program. Some concerns were raised about who would be involved in making local decisions about how time should be used in the school. | 1. To increase program flexibility and make it possible for school divisions to offer locally determined courses at the elementary and middle levels, 20% of each required course of study will be developed as optional units. A school division may reduce the time spent in one or more of the required areas (up to a maximum of 20% in any single area) in order to gain time for local program priorities.<br>2. In order to complete graduation requirements, the following approximate balance of credits will be taken at the secondary level:<br>1/3 in required courses of study<br>1/3 in specified areas of study<br>1/3 in unspecified electives.<br>3. Saskatchewan Education will continue to develop or approve all courses of study.<br>4. Decisions about the priorities of locally determined program offerings such as religious education and second language, are best made by boards of education in consideration of local needs. |

| Proposals | What the Core Curriculum Committee Proposed | What the Public Said | Policy Direction |
|---|---|---|---|

**Balance of Time at the Elementary Level Grades 1-5**

| Areas of Study | Minutes per Week |
|---|---|
| Language Arts | 350 |
| Mathematics | 210 |
| Aesthetic Education | 160 |
| Physical Education/ Health Education | 160 |
| Social Studies | 160 |
| Science | 160 |
| Locally Determined Courses | 300 |
| Total Time Available | 1500 |

30% agreed and 46% disagreed. Many wanted more time for language arts and some assurance that integration of language arts in other areas of study will actually occur.

| Areas of Study | Recommended Minutes per Week |
|---|---|
| Langage Arts | 560 |
| Mathematics | 210 |
| Arts Education | 200 |
| Physical Education | 150 |
| Health Education | 80 |
| Social Studies | 150 |
| Science | 150 |
| * Locally Determined Options | |
| — Maximum | 300 |
| — Minimum | 0 |
| Total Time Available | 1500 |

* Time for locally determined options may be gained by reducing required areas by no more than 20% in any single area.

| Proposals | What the Core Curriculum Committee Proposed | What the Public Said | Policy Direction |
|---|---|---|---|

**Balance of Time at the Middle Level Grades 6-9**

| Areas of Study | Study per Week |
|---|---|
| Language Arts | 230 |
| Mathematics | 200 |
| Aesthetic Education | 155 |
| Physical Education/ Health Education | 155 |
| Social Studies | 155 |
| Science | 155 |
| Locally Determined Courses | 450 |
| Total Time Available | 1500 |

38% agreed. Many wanted more time for language arts, health education and physical education. Guidance and counselling was mentioned as being both a service area and an area that should receive formal instruction.

| Areas of Study | Recommended Minutes per Week | |
|---|---|---|
| | Gr. 6 | Gr. 7-9 |
| Language Arts | 510 | 300 |
| Mathematics | 210 | 200 |
| Arts Education | 200 | 200 |
| Physical Education | 150 | 150 |
| Health Education | 80 | 100 |
| Guidance | 50 | 50 |
| Social Studies | 150 | 150 |
| Science | 150 | 150 |
| * Locally Determined Options | | |
| — Maximum | 300 | 375 |
| — Minimum | 0 | 200 |
| Total Time Available | 1500 | 1500 |

* Extra time to be gained by reducing required areas by not more than 20% in any single area.

In grades 6-9 students must take 50 hours of computer literacy and at least two courses in practical and applied arts (e.g., Home Economics, Industrial Arts)

| Proposals | What the Core Curriculum Committee Proposed | What the Public Said | Policy Direction |
|---|---|---|---|
| Balance of Time in Grade 10 | **Area of Study** — **Credits**<br>Language Arts 1<br>Mathematics 1<br>Science 1<br>Social Studies 1<br>Aesthetic Education 1<br>Health Ed./Physical Ed. 1<br>**Electives** 2 | 50% agreed. Others thought literature should be added as a compulsory area. Some questioned 2 credits of aesthetic education at the secondary level. Others thought that at least 1 credit of arts education (visual arts, music, drama or dance) should be compulsory during grades 10-12. | **Secondary Level**<br>**Program Credits**<br>**Required Course of Study** — **Grade 10** — **Grade 11** — **Grade 12**<br>Language Arts 2 1 1<br>Mathematics 1<br>Science 1<br>Social Studies 1<br>Canadian Studies 1<br>**Specified Areas of Study** — **Grade 10 11 or 12** — **Grade 11 or 12**<br>Language Arts 2<br>Science 1<br>Social Science 1<br>Mathematics 1<br>Arts Education 1<br>Practical & Applied Arts 2<br>Health Education/ Physical Education 1<br>**Unspecified Electives** — **Grade 10** — **Grade 11 or 12**<br>2 5<br>**Service Area** **Guidance and Counselling** |
| Balance of Time in Grades 11 and 12 | **Area of Study** — **Credits**<br>Language Arts 2<br>**Specified Areas**<br>Mathematics 1<br>Science 1<br>Social Studies 1<br>Aesthetic Ed. or Fine Arts 1<br>Health Ed./Physical Ed. 1<br>**Electives** 9 | 37% agreed. Concern was voiced about compulsory health, physical education, aesthetic education, reduction of language arts time, and reduced time for electives. | |
| High School Credits for Graduation | Require 24 credits for high school completion | 57% agreed. There was some concern about the ability of some students to complete 24 credits. Others want to see alternative programs available for students whose interests and abilities require a different type of program. | **Graduation Requirements** — A minimum of 24 credits, at least 5 of which shall be earned in Grade 12. |

# *Next Steps*

The next challenge is to establish mechanisms to develop the core curriculum and to ensure an open continuous review of educational policies.

In order to accomplish this Saskatchewan Education will move forward in four areas.

## Policy Completion and Maintenance

With the framework provided by the policy direction in this paper, the department will publish a policy document which will define specific policies for a core curriculum and will draw together and revise the policy statements presently found in a number of sources such as **Directions**, the **Division IV Policy Statements** and **Saskatchewan School Programs**.

In order to provide an external reference group to support the review and development of policies over time, the department will establish an ongoing Educational Policies Committee with representation from educational organizations.

The committee will endeavor to ensure that provincial policies for school programs are appropriate. The committee will also be asked to give advice about the implementation of present policy direction as well as the development of policies in other areas that will follow. Core curriculum policies, French language schools, heritage language and decisions about practical and applied arts will be among the first areas to be addressed by the committee.

## Common Essential Learnings

The common essential learnings are to be consciously and deliberately incorporated into all courses of study. To support this, the number and nature of the common essential learning categories are being investigated by Saskatchewan Education. When they have been defined, ways of incorporating them into curriculum and instruction will be identified in consultation with the educational community.

## Required Areas of Study

Work will proceed on the development of a statement of objectives and a kindergarten to grade 12 content outline for each of the required areas: language arts, science, mathematics, social studies, arts education, physical education and health education. This work will be done with the advice of kindergarten to grade 12 advisory committees in each of the seven areas. The outlines will be distributed to affected members of the educational community before final decisions are made.

## Curriculum Development

Saskatchewan Education will implement the policy direction and the associated curriculum changes on a reasonable schedule that respects the amount of change that can be supported by teachers, boards of education, and Saskatchewan Education.

With this policy direction in place, there is much to be done to meet the goal of providing young people with a high level of the knowledge, skills and attitudes that will serve them well in further education, in the workplace, in the family and in the community.

Each of the partners in education is searching for ways to contribute to this goal. Teacher educators in this province are already examining their potential to provide prospective teachers with the abilities to teach the core curriculum. Trustees, administrators and school staffs are engaged in developing plans to support improvement in programs, environment and instruction.

Teachers and their Federation and trustees and their Association have played a major role in defining curriculum policy and making professional development a priority.

The department has helped initiate change at the provincial and school division levels through its work with advisory committees, a new curriculum development model and a provincial school improvement initiative. The Government of Saskatchewan is committed to educational improvement and has put in place the Education Development Fund to support local initiatives for improving the quality of education.

This spirit of collaboration is characteristic of the way educators have worked in Saskatchewan for many years. In a time of restraint it is even more imperative to combine resources and work together to ensure a quality education for the students of Saskatchewan.